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TESTIMONY

Michigan House of Representatives
Families, Children and Seniors Committee
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By Karen Schrock, President & CEO, Adult Well-Being Services

Good morning. I am Karen Schrock, President & CEO of Adult Well-Being Services.

Adult Well-Being Services has been providing services and programs to older adults, adults with mental illness and developmental disabilities for fifty nine years. One of the many services we provide is guardianship for people who are forgotten about in our society. They are alone, isolated, and susceptible to abuse and exploitation, most often by family members. Adult Well-Being Services also provides long term care ombudsman and advocacy services in twenty-one counties to residents in nursing homes and other long term care institutions.

In 2005 -2006, I served as an appointee on the Governor's Task Force on Elder Abuse. The proposed package of elder abuse bills before you now were drafted in large part on the basis of the research and recommendations from this Task Force. Among the more compelling facts about elder abuse reported by the Task Force is that estimates suggest for every one case of elder abuse, neglect, exploitation or self-neglect reported to authorities, about five more go unreported. The trends suggest up to one in ten adults age 65+ will experience abuse and/or exploitation.

Nearly every one of us has heard stories about seniors whose family members won't allow them to have visitors, or who are living in deteriorating housing with no utilities or food, or whose financial assets have been depleted by persons to whom they entrusted with their financial management. Unfortunately, abusers are not always easy to identify. Often, the victims are not physically or mentally able to report their abuse, or they may be too afraid or ashamed to tell someone. That is why the actual numbers of elders who have been injured, exploited or otherwise mistreated is much higher than statistics currently indicate.

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The incidences of elder abuse that Adult Well-Being Services has seen are appalling, horrifying and completely unacceptable - because *many could have been prevented if we had the laws and tools in place*. We had one client referred by Adult Protective Services who was sleeping in the living room in a hospital bed that was wet and filthy. When one of our staff visited her, she had a black eye that she said came from her brother who hit her with his fist. She had to have five surgeries on her eye. Another guardianship client referred by Adult Protective Services had a son who was reportedly a drug dealer. The people to whom the son owed money broke in the house of our elderly client and beat her up. When one of our staff went to the house to take her to a medical appointment, we found her locked out of her house, by her son. We helped her to find safe shelter.

Last year, a chilling case of elder abuse was perpetrated on a 95-year old man. The Wayne County Probate Judge suspected that the man's daughter was abusing him and referred him to us for guardianship and care. An AWBS Guardianship Worker went to the man's home and presented letters of authority for the ward. The man's oldest daughter refused to open the door. A call to the Fire Department was made. Firemen kicked the door in. What they found shocked them. The 95 year old man was sitting on a tattered couch, naked, wrapped in a urine-soaked sheet, and barely able to speak. Next to him was his younger daughter, 68-years old, in obvious need of medical attention. Both were in a dark upstairs room of an unkempt house. The gas meter had been removed from the home in October. On this below-freezing degree day in January, there was no heat. Our staff person immediately called 9-1-1. The man and his daughter were taken to Detroit Receiving Hospital. The nurse reported that both were emaciated and malnourished. That wasn't all. When AWBS staff contacted Comerica Bank, we learned that there was little left in the ward's account because the older daughter had been making monthly withdrawals. Alerted, the bank froze the account and agreed to forward the remaining funds to AWBS to provide care for the ward. The man and his younger daughter are now safe and secure in Samaritan Manor Nursing home. The elderly man cannot stop thanking us for saving his life.

These are just three among hundreds of stories about elder abuse and exploitation. Currently, resources and tools to prevent and prosecute elder abuse are inadequate. We *must* do more to protect our loved ones. You have the opportunity, now, to make clear that in Michigan, elder abuse and exploitation are crimes and will no longer be treated lightly, ignored or accepted. Please support the elder abuse legislation before you. Thank you.